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Bushcare The National Vegetation Initiative

On the 13th of August I attended a forum in Melbourne arranged to inform the Commonwealth Government of the views of those involved in "Bushcare". In ignorance of what "Bushcare" was I did a ring around before committing myself to a day in the City - but I still arrived totally confused, having been assured that it both was and wasn't a new name for "Save the Bush" programs.

Now I know -

Bushcare: The National Vegetation Initiative (referred to as N.V.I.!!!!) has as its goal:

'To reverse the long-term decline in the quality and extent of native vegetation communities in order to conserve biodiversity and to contribute to the ecologically sustainable management of natural resources in Australia.'

Funding will be devoted to 'extensive revegetation activities and protection of remnant native vegetation at risk from unsustainable clearing.'

It combines 7 previous Programs including Save the Bush, 1 Billion Trees, Greening Australia, Corridors of Green, Threatened Species, Grasslands Ecology and Wet Tropics Tree Planting with ten times the funding of all these programs combined. (\$360 million over 4 years). Thus it is the largest of the Commonwealth Government's National Heritage Trust (N.H.T.) programs. It does not replace but complements Landcare, i.e., some future projects will be purely Bushcare, some purely Landcare with a congenial overlap where appropriate.

Most delegates to Melbourne's forum were professional workers in the field with a very limited number of non-government conservation group delegates invited. I was delighted to find that four Bendigo conservation/naturalist folk we know well turned up at minimal notice as well as Bendigo based D.R.N.E. Flora and Fauna officer, Peter Johnson.

The aims of the day were to provide up-to-date information on Bushcare to the broad range of people and organisations involved in native vegetation, to explore and to work together to maximise Bushcare's effectiveness. The morning speakers included Andrew Campbell (now Environment Australia chief), Danny O'Neill (D.R.N.E. Victoria - director of Sustainable Development in Catchment Management), Esther Abram (Environment Victoria, which, I think, umbrellas about 80 conservation interest/friends groups), Graham Hunter (Greening Australia) and my favourite, Sue Campbell (Victorian Farmers' Federation Farm Tree Group) who gave it straight as she sees the situation as a practical farmer. Her message was that even the most 'green' of graziers will, when faced with a situation of intense unremitting drought (which appears very likely soon) will be tempted to allow starving stock into 'protected' areas, regardless of the fact that the fencing was partly provided for remnant vegetation protection and revegetation projects.

Another speaker almost caused a riot in our section of the audience when he put the case for the present forestry arrangements being the model for other situations.

The afternoon workshops were asked to provide ideas on

- * improvements in vegetation management - how? what? where? who?
- * how participation could be encouraged
- * what gaps there are in information or in the capacity to deliver the greatest impact.

As to be expected, there was a general call for review of the cumbersome and expensive submission system for funding projects - project ideas and design; paperwork required; assessment and choice of applications; feedback on unsuccessful bids; monitoring, long and short term, of individual projects and of the combination of outcomes of projects in meeting goals (area, state, national). There was a call for non-government groups to be represented on panels which assess applications for funding. There was also a call for far greater attention to be paid to looking back at projects undertaken in the past and learning from the results - necessary both for young new professional officers and for groups planning new projects. E.g., what is the state of the vegetation involved in the 1982 \$½ million Fraser Government tree program? It was seen to be important to fund projects so that long term maintenance can and will be done.

Currently, funding seems to be designed for revegetation establishment or initial protection by fencing. Here was also seen to be need to gather the most successful creative practices of other States into our repertoire e.g., W.A. has one rate for subsidising fencing around protected plots, a higher rate is paid if a legal commitment is made to protect that area for 10 years and an even higher subsidy is paid if the land has a covenant put on it.

There is a definite call (Senator Hill) for funding to go from the

Commonwealth directly to Local Government, bypassing the State administration for on-ground works.

Questions were also asked about the position of formal parks and reserves in the scheme of things. Bushcare is focussed on private land vegetation.

Bendigo based delegates travelled home together, somewhat jovially hysterical after the intense day. The rest of the commuters were very subdued, but most faces wore odd expressions as we reviewed our understandings and confusions! As the current meetings are only in 'major cities', we agreed to seek a similar forum in Bendigo soon, so that the opportunity of participation and advice giving can be extended to this region. Yes, it was a talkfest, but a most interesting day. I'd urge you to think about the issues of projects, taxpayers dollars and vegetation/biodiversity decline etc., in preparation for joining in 'TELLING THEM IN CANBERRA....'

Margaret Hunter

P.S. Max Gilbert, Chair of State Roadsides Committee and consultant told me that the Mount Alexander Shire Roadsides Management Plan is now complete and is to be used as a State model for other Shires.

M.H.

Babblings from Barkers Creek #4

France and Barkers Creek

As you can well imagine, I find there are many differences when I think about our recent trip to France and compare my many wonderful memories with those scenes that greeted me on my return, yet the two countries also have some similarities.

It is not uncommon now in France to see many fields unattended, put to pasture or 'stood down' because of more productive methods of farming, e.g. lot farming. As you probably realise, most French farms, at least in the Perigord, are small. Yet it was interesting to notice that even now there is not a lot of wild life or birds evident. I wondered if, over the years, they have been shot to minimal survival levels.

What birds I did see were, to me, like English song birds whose territory advertising calls in the twilight were a delight to listen to as the light faded on such picturesque countryside. It made me wish that we had more song larks at Barkers Creek. Jacqui obtained a French publication, in colour, on France's bird life, but alas, I saw very few of them.

Barkers Creek

When we returned to our home, a countryside of a different beauty, but with greater charm and harmony when seen through Australian eyes, greeted us. Our front terrace had in our absence been invaded by this season's crop of Crimson Rosellas. Now at breakfast we have continually swirling flashes of colour as they each compete for

supremacy: one morning this week we had 18 Crimson Rosellas feeding together. Occasionally, Marg and Kennet, our house Magpies, swoop in to disturb the peace, bossy as ever.

I have now installed some more nesting boxes bringing the total to date up to thirteen. All are being regularly visited, and inspected, but to date no one has lodged a deposit for the spring rental period. The duck box near the dam continues to be ignored by the four Wood Ducks that now frequent our place - when Marg grants them permission. The Kookaburras have checked out their box but it seems they may have recieved a better offer elsewhere.

The Spreading Wattle has finished for the season and now the Golden Wattles are coming into full bloom, much to the delight of the Rosellas who spend a lot of time hanging from them like giant blooms of flashing red and green. Often there are so many on one small branch that the bush bends under their weight.

There is no sign of wildflowers as yet. The recent dry may affect the crop this year, but it is a delightful time of the year as so many things occur in the bird and plant worlds.

John Turnbull

Yorke Peninsular

We have just returned from a pleasant two weeks holiday in South Australia, a week of which was spent on the Yorke Peninsular, including 4 days at Marion Bay, which is a small settlement 54 kms from the nearest town of Minlaton, and 5 kms from the the Innes National Park, which has mainly Mallee and heath vegetation growing on a limey soil, and several large, shallow lakes, three of which are excluded from the park as gypsum is still being mined there. The unsealed roads around this part of the peninsular all glitter with crystals of calcite.

There is a good birdlist for the park, which includes the Western Whip Bird, but the day we visited - in fact the whole time we were on the tip of the peninsular - it was WINDY! so our view of birds too often was interesting flashes that shot up out of the scrub and immediately dived in again - and I wasn't travelling with an avid bird watcher! We did sit for a while and watch Welcome Swallows bathing and gathering mud in some puddles in the Cable Beach camping area. Almost at the end of the road at Browns Lake I spotted three Hooded Plovers feeding on the mudflat around the shallow lake.

Most of the information concerning the park is geared to fishermen and surfers, with a little bit of history thrown in. Inneston, a ghost town virtually - only three houses are occupied and you can rent another two or three - is a fascinating place with a good walking track. It is situated at the side of a shallow lake which was formed when the gypsum was dug by hand many years ago. We wandered among the remains of old buildings for about an hour reading the information boards which filled us in with the history of the place. As quite a bit of the track was

among the scrub there were all sorts of interesting sounds, but it was mainly Willie Wagtails, thornbills, ravens and Grey (Brown) Currawongs that we managed to see - and Red Wattlebirds, of course.

The coastline of the peninsular is quite spectacular - and very dangerous - but there are some secluded sandy beaches, and Pondalowie Well and Bay area is well worth the visit. It's a favourite spot with both fishermen and surfers. There's another camping spot, at Surfers Beach, a little further on, and it was there we saw Western Grey Kangaroos grazing. Only one camp was there, but campers and Kangaroos just seemed to ignore each other. The whipbirds live in the area between there and Browns Lake, but though we saw quite a few birds - fleetingly - we saw nothing like a whipbird.

Another beach that we visited was Ethel Beach with the remains of the wrecks of the "Ethel" and the "Ferret", and up on the cliff top there is a history of both ships. These information boards throughout the park I found quite helpful, as I knew little of the history of the area. As we were driving down the track to Ethel Beach Doug remarked on the conical heaps on the road, and we soon saw those responsible - half a dozen Emus. I'm not sure whether they were young ones or that the peninsular has a lighter race, but they were much lighter in colour than any I have seen before.

Browns Beach is interesting in that it is the spot on the mainland where the young salmon stop over to feed on the way from the spawning grounds in W.A. to New South Wales, so of course, it is another popular spot with the fishermen.

Over the next couple of days we explored some of the other areas of the lower end of the Peninsular, visiting such places as Yorketown and Edithburgh. Wildflowers were coming out including wattles, mallees Cockies Tongues and Thomasias, as there'd been some rain. At Marion Bay I found a beautiful correa with red flowers and glossy green leaves.

We drove back to Marion Bay along the coast, through some interestingly named areas, such as Moorowie Bay, Mozzie Flat and Foul Bay.

For anyone wanting a different kind of holiday among friendly people I'd recommend some time at Marion Bay. We stayed at the well run and reasonably priced Caravan Park, where there were Red Wattlebirds, Spiney-cheeked and Singing Honeyeaters, Silvereyes and thornbills, Crested Pigeons, Willie Wagtails (one chasing a Fantail Cuckoo), Eastern Spinebills and New Holland Honeyeaters, and down by the laundry there is a good chance of seeing the family of White-browed Babblers. On the nearby beach we saw Caspian and Crested Terns as well as the ubiquitous Silver Gulls, and a few Pacific Gulls.

We certainly didn't cover the whole area of the Peninsular, but we did stay at Moonta and visited some parts of the Copper Triangle, and made a visit to Port Broughton, taking the coast road through a little

place called Tickera, but the little we have seen has inspired us to make another visit some time.

Rita Mills

Video Review

"Dancing with Dingoes"

as presented by the "Barefoot Bushman on Channel 7, 12/7/97

This tape presents the history of the Dingo, which evolved from the wolf, and is the world's most ancient dog breed.

It came to Australia from Asia about 3½ thousand years ago, probably with the Aboriginal people. A complete and well preserved skeleton found in a cave in the bank of the Murray river has been dated at over 3000 years of age, and evidence from rock art to be seen in the Zinkan country of north Queensland would indicate that the Aborigines were using the Dingo as a hunting dog at that time. Dingoes are social animals and enjoy the company of people, bonding readily to individuals.

There is considerable coverage of Bruce Jacob's Dingo farm at Chewton, with emphasis on the importance of his breeding program for the preservation of the Alpine Dingo, which is close to extinction. A visit to Bruce's farm reveals a wealth of knowledge and information and it could be said that what Bruce doesn't know about Dingoes isn't worth knowing.

The Dingo is now legal in Victoria and is soon to become so in N.S.W., but it is still regarded as vermin in all other states except Northern Territory where it is exempt as the Aboriginal hunting dog. It's Victorian status is due in no small part to Bruce's efforts, and he is now able to sell pups to prospective owners.

Another section of the tape deals with Thailand, where Dingoes are known as Thai dogs. It was from Thailand that they probably came to Australia. There they serve as domestic pets and scavengers, and are regarded with great affection by the Thai people. Unlike our Dingoes they are vegetarian, and live chiefly on rice and bananas, peacefully co-existing with chickens and pigs. In some remote mountain villages on the borders of Thailand they are themselves a source of protein for the hill tribes, though elsewhere this does not occur.

Here the Dingo is important in outback areas to assist in the survival of such threatened species as the Rabbit-eared Bilby, simply by keeping the population of feral cats and foxes to a minimum in such areas.

Finally the tape touches on the issue of tourism and Dingoes, the Chamberlain case and other incidents which indicate that caution and respect are necessary where Dingoes are concerned.

This is a fascinating tape, packed with information and entertainment, and is available at Bruce's Dingo farm and in Video shops.

Shirley Parnaby.

Observations

- * On a visit to Golden Beach, NSW, George and Phee Broadway were amazed to see an Osprey Nest sitting on a pole in the middle of an Urban development. When the area had been cleared the nest was removed from the tree it was in and placed on the pole. It has been there for five years and is still being used.
- * A nesting hollow near Brenda Envall's place is being investigated by both Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, with the local Maggie supervising. Yellow-rumped Thornbills have been taking nesting materials from an old nest. She also reported that a Black-shouldered Kite has been seen again after two years absence, and that she has some aggressive New Holland Honeyeaters in the garden.
- * At Broadways lagging is being pinched by a Raven for nest material.
- * George also reported an incident where a friend, who'd climbed a tree out of the reach of a wild pig family, including the boar, was watching them and a pair of Wedgetails soaring overhead when one of the birds swooped and took one of the piglets.
- * Both George Broadway and Shirley Parnaby have reported that both Boobook Owls are back at their perch in the gardens. Shirley observed that though their perch is becoming quite exposed these days the owls don't seem inclined to move to better cover. Their pellets show that they are feeding much better this year as they contain quite a percentage of mouse bones.
- * George also saw a flock of Brown Headed Honeyeaters in the Gardens, but they were soon sent off by New Holland Honeyeaters.
- * Kay Turner's Spotted Pardalote is back again, attacking the kitchen window, possibly after cobwebs, but it keeps this up for hours at a time with only short breaks.
- * After seven weeks of wonderful bird watching all the way to Darwin and back (she's promised a full report!) Margaret Willis has come home to Crimson and Eastern Rosellas and Calahs in her garden in Thomas St.
- * Chris Morris has reported that a friend of his in Redesdale has had a flock of Torquoise Parrots in his rose garden.
- * Maggie Oliver told of almost being hit in the face by two speeding Blackbirds in her back garden. She's not sure who got the bigger fright!
- * Susanna Starr reports a Horsefields Bronze-cuckoo in Bowden St on 9/8 and a Restless Flycatcher also about that time and again on 18/8.
- * Lorraine Rye has heard the Cicada Bird calling near their place toward the end of August.
- * Maureen and Ken Dredge report 3 Grey Crowned Babblers at the Castlemaine Golf Course. They were scolded - the birds are breeding. They also reported 8 - 10 Swift Parrots feeding on lerps there. Also seen, a male Pink Robin at Muckleford forest. They have had regular sightings of Crested Bellbirds there, too.
- * Two bird species seen on the Murray flats opposite Nildottie - Bourkes and Mulga Parrots. Along a back road in the area friends had directed us to a hill of shells - what was left after using the rest for road gravel! Rita Mills

C . F . N . C . PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church Hall. The entrance to car park is behind the Art Gallery, Lyttleton Street.

Fri Sept 12 Film "Microcosmos" A day in the life of an insect in a field in France. 10.30 am at the GOLDEN TWIN CINEMA. note change of venue Sponsored by B'go FNC and B'go U3A.

Fri Sept 12 The meeting will be joining Bendigo Native Plant Group to hear Leon Costermans, author of a number of books on trees and shrubs. Leave from 27 Doveton st at 7.15. for Osborn Theatre, Osborn St Campus.

Sat Sept 13 Exploring Mt Franklin area. Leave 13 Mostyn St at 1.30pm. Leader is M.Dredge.

Thurs Sept 18 First of the Spring walks in areas of local bush. Leader is R.Mills. Leave 27 Doveton St. at 4pm. Outing of 1-1½ hrs duration.

Thurs Sept 25 Spring walk. Leader. M. Dredge. Arrangements as above.

Thurs Oct 2. Spring walk. Leader J.Turnbull. Arrangements as above.

Fri Oct 10 Plants of the Ballarat District, Pat and Bill Murphy, Ballarat F.N.C. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sun Oct 12 Mt Beckwith. All day excursion. Leaders Pat and Bill Murphy of Ballarat FNC. Meet at Clunes P.O. at 11am. Take lunch, etc.

Wed Oct 15 Working Bee. Cape Broom Pull. Meet at 9 am at the corner of Mary St. and Froomes Rd. Bring thick protective gloves.

Fri Nov 14 "In the steps of Baron Von Mueller - The North Australian Exploring Expedition", Marco Duretto, speaker. UCA hall. 8pm.

Fri Dec 12. Members and visitors night. Start thinking about what you might be able to contribute to the program for our last meeting for the year.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St. at 8.00pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions 1997 - Ordinary Membership: Single \$16 Family \$24

Pensioner/Student: Single \$12 Family \$18. Supporting \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

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